

HOMEMADE FOOD WASTE COMPOSTER

Properly composted, food scraps can turn into an excellent fertilizer for gardens. However, composting food scraps in an open pile or mixed with yard waste can attract some unwanted urban pests - rats, mice, raccoons and possums! Here's how to easily make your own pest-proof food waste composter that avoids that problem.

Making the Composter and Getting Started

One of the simplest ways to compost food waste is in a sunken garbage can. The can should have a tight-fitting lid and holes punched in the bottom. A galvanized metal can (about \$15 new) works well. Drill or punch about 20 drain holes, 1/4 or 3/8 inch diameter, in the bottom of the can. Then drill 10 air holes in the side, spaced around the upper lip of the can. If the lid is not tight, make a lid out of a piece of plywood, with a handle on top and some wood blocks underneath to fit the lip of the can and help hold the lid on.



Dig a hole about 15 inches deep in a well-drained corner of your yard and set the can into the hole. Then push the soil back in around the sides. Your new composter is ready to use! If odor or fruit flies are a problem you can stockpile bags of brown leaves, sawdust, straw, or shredded paper near the composter and place a thin layer of them on each new addition to the can.

Harvesting the Compost

Depending on your household's food habits, the composter will fill in 4-8 months. Now it's time to harvest some compost. You can shovel the upper foot or so of undecomposed food off to one side and shovel the dark, soil-like compost out of the bottom. If the finished compost is wet and smelly, mix it with some soil and wait a week for it to turn drier and sweet smelling. Replace the top layer in the can. You can also bury the top layer in a trench in the garden, making more room for food scraps in the can. If you choose to use a second can, you can just let the food scraps sit until the worms move in and finish the composting!



**The Master Composter Program is sponsored by
Seattle Tilth Association and Seattle Public Utilities.
Call the Compost Hotline at 633-0224 for more
information about composting and recycling.**

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Using Compost

The most common uses of compost are as a mulch on established plants, as a soil enricher at planting time, and in potting mixes. Food waste compost contains more nutrients than yard waste compost, and should be used more sparingly. It can be applied as a one-inch mulch around plants or up to two inches can be dug into garden soil. For a potting mix, add up to 20% food waste compost to a commercial or homemade potting mix.

| Do Compost | Don't Compost |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vegetable Scraps• Grains and pasta• Fruit rinds and peels• Breads• Coffee grounds, filters• Tea bags• Paper napkins, towels• Egg shells | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meat• Fish and poultry• Cheese• Oily foods• Butter• Other animal products |

Problems?

Here are some common problems and how to fix them:

- **Odors and fruit flies**

Stir in leaves or sawdust to keep the pile aerobic. Cover the fresh food waste with leaves, sawdust, straw or shredded newspaper to exclude fruit flies. If you prefer to use grass clippings as a covering material, first leave them in the sun for a week until they turn brown. Once a healthy worm population is established in the composter, they will help reduce odors by aerating the pile. Always keep the lid closed.

- **Raccoons or dogs knock the lid off**

It's important to keep the lid on your composter to keep rodents out. Place a rock on the lid or tie a bungee cord from the can handle up through the lid handle and down to the other can handle to hold the lid on. And be sure to keep meat waste out! It smells bad and attracts animals, so it is better to put it in the garbage.

Questions?

For questions about food waste composting or for more information about backyard composting in general, call the **Compost Hotline, 633-0224**.